

US, China agree on one thing: ski pants Senators from region, fearing shortage, get import cap lifted

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By Alan Wirzbicki, Globe Correspondent | December 13, 2005

WASHINGTON -- The United States and China may differ on human rights, trade, Taiwan, and other hot-button issues, but the two governments reached agreement last month on at least one dispute: ski pants.

In response to complaints from senators from northern New England, the federal government lifted an import quota on Chinese-made synthetic ski and snowboard apparel that ski shops said could have led to a critical shortage on the slopes this winter.

Synthetic ski clothing is rarely made in the United States anymore, and ski vendors had warned that if the cap on imports had remained, stores might not have been able to meet demand. Sales of ski clothing from China have jumped from almost nothing in 2004 to about half of the import market through September of this year. Chinese-made ski pants protected by the agreement cost \$4.84 to make on average, according to Commerce Department statistics, but often retail for more than \$100.

Under the new pact, skiers will be assured "an ample supply of ski pants" from Chinese factories, US Senator Jim Jeffords, Independent of Vermont and one of the senators who argued for lifting the quota, said in a statement.

Clothing imported from China is subject to quotas to prevent goods from flooding the US market. Under pressure from domestic textile manufacturers, the two countries recently extended the quotas through 2008.

Lloyd Wood, a spokesman for the American Manufacturing Trade Action Coalition, which favors textile quotas, said Chinese manufacturers have unfair advantages over US makers and criticized the loophole for a luxury good like ski pants. Wood said American manufacturers were perfectly capable of making ski clothing domestically.

"To exempt ski pants, you're defeating the underlying purpose of the agreement," he said. "Can we produce it? Absolutely." ■